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EXECUTIVE AND PERSONNEL
MANAGEMENT
ON THE
NATIONAL FORESTS

"Discussion", no. 31 follows Lesson 32.



A MEDIUM FOR THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND
EXPERIENCES BY OPERATING EXECUTIVES
FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE
SERVICE

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A STUDY COURSE OR WHAT?

During the last four years we have had our all service study courses and I think all Supervisors have contributed more or less to them. Some not so much, but anyhow because of the large number participating as well as the high quality of the contributions, these courses have attracted a great deal of attention outside the Service. Also because of the discussions, the Forester has taken a great deal of interest in them. I have been told by an expert accountant that no industrial organization in the country could get from its operating executives so universal a response or so intelligent an interest as you gave to our discussion of costs.

From these and other evidences of value it would seem that we should be satisfied with results and that we would have another course this year. By we, I mean all of us and not just myself. However, the Service is never satisfied that there is anything that it cannot improve. It has been decided therefore, that no course will be given this winter. We are going to try for something better. The courses were good but had their weaknesses. They were not flexible. We started in on a course and stayed with it throughout the year no matter how many interesting problems came up in the meantime. What we want is something that can be tied in more closely to going interests. With that, we want to retain all the desirable features of the courses. The Forester particularly wants the discussion feature retained.

The plan that is being proposed will work something like this. We will have our lessons periodically, although we may drop the term "lesson". It was a misnomer anyhow. In these new lessons current administrative problems will be discussed. Guard training, job analysis, personnel cases, office standards, whatever it is that is being pushed at the time, may be discussed for one or more lessons; or we may discuss two or three subjects in one lesson. Another departure will be that I will depend upon some of you to write most of the lessons. Instead of discussing my stuff you will be discussing executive problems written up by executives.

Another thing that has interested me very much is this. Recently the President appointed a Personnel Council. As advisors to the council there is a group of industrial experts who will keep the council advised as to progress in industry. When Forest officers read the names of these experts they recognized practically every one of them. Forest Supervisors were already, through their writings, using this same group of men as advisors. That is, you Supervisors are familiar with management literature and know something of what is going on in industrial management and who its leaders are. It is very desirable that you keep up this contact. In the past we have had our supplemental reading. For the future we will attempt to give you reviews of current management articles or books and furnish

you with such pamphlets and other material as we can get. In the past I have chosen the supplemental reading material. The proposed scheme will give you a chance to participate in that feature also. If you find a book or article of value you can send it in or at least send in a review. I think you will like to do this since several of you have sent in things in the past when there was no provision for using them.

Another flexible feature is that we may if we like, publish, in addition to the lessons and discussions, papers on new methods, administrative studies, or such other improvements as may be of general interest. I do not mean to include here silvicultural or other technical studies, but only those relating to executive management. Supervisors are primarily executives and necessarily must give some time to the study of their profession. Opportunities for such studies are limited at many Forest headquarters. For that reason exchanges of experiences and discussions of common problems must be depended on largely for keeping in touch with progress.

There are other things that may be done or may not. It will depend largely on you. My job as I understand it, is not to force something upon you but to be of all the help that I can to you. I have access to libraries. I have time to search for material. Let me know what you want and I'll do what I can to find it.

Briefly, then, the plan is this: We will continue our study of executive management but not as a formal study course. There will be "lessons" or problems written up for discussion. Your discussions will be published as before. There will be supplemental reading material as heretofore to help in keeping in touch with management progress. There will be an opportunity to include other material also if desired. The plan is much like the old except that being less formal it may be kept in closer touch with current problems. As heretofore your discussions will be strictly informal, expressing personal views dissociated from the administrative functioning of the organization.

REVIEWS

A Personnel Program for the Federal Civil Service

By Herman Feldman published as House Document No. 773,
71st Congress, 3rd Session

As an example of what reviews might be, I am going to try to review for you, briefly, the above designated House Document. This document has been placed in each Regional library and is available to anyone who cares to read it. But I know most of you will not have the time. It is of interest to you, however, for several reasons: First, it is in itself a good text book on personnel management. Second, it will be a considerable satisfaction to you to find in how many things the Service is now doing or trying to do the thing advocated for all Government Departments. Third, in the things not done or not sufficiently done, it is still a satisfaction to know that we are not even there at the bottom of the list. Fourth, your studies and discussions in personnel and executive management are specifically mentioned and approved. Fifth, the President by executive order has established a central personnel council somewhat along the lines advocated by the report. If this council develops into a real force in personnel administration, we can best cooperate with it by knowing that for which it stands.

The report was written by Dr. Feldman, Professor of Industrial Relations at Dartmouth. Dr. Feldman is well acquainted with developments in personnel management both in private industry and in progressive Governments of the world. He discusses all phases of personnel practice in our own Government departments, pointing out advantages and disadvantages and indicating desirable practices without specifically recommending anything. However, the things he advocates are the things generally recognized as the best practice in the most progressive American industries.

“The United States Government employs a larger and more diversified group of people than the American Telephone and Telegraph Co., the General Motors Corporation, the Pennsylvania Railroad, the United States Steel Corporation, or any other of the mammoth business organizations which have captured public imagination.” “On June 30, 1928, almost 569,000 persons were enumerated as belonging to the so-called executive Civil Service alone.” “The size of the Federal personnel establishment turns slight errors into large difficulties, slight economies into huge savings, slight improvements into important reforms.” “To the Government, therefore, the responsibility for a modern personnel program presents an opportunity for far-seeing measures, challenging the highest qualities of leadership in the executive departments and the most constructive wisdom of Congress.” “The discussion which follows is divided into two parts. Part 1 is concerned with the development of a consistent and adequate

Government wage policy. Since a wage policy is in many points inseparable from a personnel policy, a Government personnel program is the subject of Part 2. This contains a final chapter in which the Government agencies relating to employment are reviewed, and in which consideration is given to the organization required to put a coordinated program into operation."

The above group of sentences is taken from the introductory chapter. They indicate the size of the problem and in general the nature of the solution. Dr. Feldman while discussing the advantages and disadvantages of various methods, seems to favor strongly a central personnel agency for coordinating all personnel activities. Of course we have that now, in the Civil Service Commission, for one phase of personnel work. However, there are a lot of difficulties in the way of extending it to all other phases. The greatest argument in its favor is the utter lack of anything even approaching modern personnel work in many branches as organized today.

The report takes the industrial point of view that the employees headed by the President is the organization. In industry it is often asserted that the success of a president depends on his ability to organize and train the men under him. Carnegie attributed his success to his organization; other industrial leaders have said that their chief job was training, using training in a broad sense of course. While there is no reason why this idea should not apply equally to Government, yet no President according to the report has exercised any real leadership in promoting a personnel program. Perhaps exception should be made of the present President who has appointed a council to study the problem and attempt to improve the service. Looking at it from the industrial viewpoint of something to be done, who actually carries on the business of the Government and performs its thousand-and-one duties and functions? So Dr. Feldman is impressed by his finding that the Civil employees are divided into hundreds of almost independent units—departments, bureaus, divisions, offices, with no correlation, no convincing purpose, no attempt at cooperation. He visualizes it as a unit with a common policy and a common purpose, lead personally by the President in a coordinated, cooperative effort to give the public the best possible service. Such a President with such an organization back of him should be a wonderful success. In fact an efficient, purposeful, enthusiastic organization is possible, and not at all improbable. Many steps toward that end have already been taken—the merit system applying to 76 per cent of all employees, the classification of jobs, the old age retirement act, the increases in salary, and other, several other changes that have helped.

In reality the Civil Service is not now so awfully inefficient. It has bad spots and good spots; it has many bad practices and many good ones. Its worst fault is its "inferiority complex". "Among the important causes of such false notions are the unfair and unfounded

attacks on Federal employees indulged in by various persons of prominence." I'll bet right now that half of you are willing to believe these unfair attacks as applying to other Bureaus even though you know they are not true when applied to ours. This is not right, but results from hearing criticisms and hearing nothing to the contrary. We ought to know that the entire service is good, know why it's good and be proud of it and proud to belong. We are proud of the Forest Service because we know for what it stands. We should be proud of the Federal Service for the same reason. This could be brought about through some central coordinating informing agency. Such a condition has been brought about in this manner in the British civil service.

Another general proposition discussed is the duty of every organization to provide a place for its share of the naturally inefficient. All people are not equal in ability. We can not all be Babe Ruths. All any of us can do is to do our best. If all organizations refused to hire those under average ability there would be great hardship among the least fortunate. Some private organizations consciously recognize this duty. The Federal service should do likewise. Our branch of the service should do what it can but we just can not do much. Rangers must be well above the average to give anything like satisfactory service to the public. And with such large values at stake, even our temporary protective force should be mostly above average.

A "flexible transfer system" is given a lot of attention. It is also reported that this is one of the projects to be studied by the personnel council. Theoretically it sounds fine but can it be made to work? "While the individual who enters the service believes he is working for the United States Government as a whole, he may be, in fact, the employee of a particular supervisor in a small unit of a few people, and the conditions he meets may give him no greater opportunity for readjustment than is afforded to the employee of a small private office. He may have less ease in getting a transfer to another unit of the Government than he would in getting a wholly new job." This is unfortunate in some respects but in our enthusiasm for the individual we must not lose sight of the interests of the whole people. The work must be done.

However, I can not help believing that our numerous transfers, often the result of necessity rather than desire, have contributed largely to our uniformity of standards as well as our constant growth in efficiency. It is a good thing within the organization and I hope we keep it up. But there is undoubtedly a tightening up in this regard. Transfers between Regions are almost unknown. Supervisors naturally dislike to lose a good man and fear receiving a poor one. Men hate to move. Much sentiment is against it. It is a question worth studying ourselves, and good luck to the larger study.

Some of the "elements of a personnel program" discussed in the report are as follows:

1. "Improvement of the selection process, to assure the recruitment of a superior personnel, the more accurate matching of capacities with assignments, and the proper introduction of employees to the work environment."

The discussion of this element offers us nothing new since we discussed it pretty thoroughly two years ago. We are doing or trying to do most of the things advocated but not yet doing all of them as well as we might. We have contacts with the schools, our chief source of supply for permanent employees, and have given attention to other sources. The testing by the Civil Service Commission is of course of high class. They have developed the science of selection through written examination to the highest point yet reached anywhere. The report comments on the exceptional work done by the Commission's research division, but this is not news to you as it has been mentioned more than once in our discussions. Unfortunately for us their research organization has never made a study of any of our examinations. I had hoped to interest Dr. O'Rourke in our Ranger examination, but now that he is Director of the President's personnel council he will probably not have the time. That examination needs something but I don't know what.

The Commission is still working on the improvement of tests and will no doubt continue to progress. Aptitude and vocational tests of various kinds are being studied that will aid in placement as well as in selection. Placement as now handled is to the best interest of neither the appointee or the Service. As we discussed two years ago a man may fit one place and not another, but getting him to the place where he fits best is a real problem. It deserves further study. And likewise the introduction of new men to their job. "The new employee should be given attention from time to time to see how he is getting along and to make certain that there is no misunderstanding or neglect which is responsible for poor performance. This is a matter for the departments, but the ways for making the policy effective require central promotion of the idea. Some bureaus or offices take special pains to introduce a new worker to his job, to give him proper instruction, to help him over periods of discouragement and to make him feel confident of his success. Others pay little attention to these helpful informalities relying largely on the survival of the fittest." We have given this matter considerable attention and probably rank pretty well up. Sometimes it is particularly difficult, but I believe you are all doing what you can.

2. "Use of the interval of probation as a supplementary period for testing qualifications and determining whether an employee shall be permitted to acquire a permanent status in the Government service."

The discussion of the probation period is one of the finest things in thereport. Wish you could everyone read it. The following quotations will interest you:

"A period of probation is to be considered as a supplementary selective device in which the applicant is given somewhat more extensive observation as to his fitness for the Government service as a whole". "The probation period provided in the law is a privilege of the Service to be most zealously guarded." "A procedure of selection * * * * can never be adequate to a final estimate of the abilities and traits of individuals at work." "The first few days or weeks on the job can be regarded as part of the selective process and will serve to weed out certain misfits. The first two or three months constitute a more refined procedure in which factors not originally detected are disclosed. Then action can be taken, with some certainty, to prevent the evil of a poor selection from becoming a permanent liability. Instead, the Federal Service has allowed probation to go by default. It is practically never used." "Affirmative action on the part of administrators should replace the automatic procedure which is now honored chiefly in the breach." Allowing men not up to standard to automatically receive permanent appointment "indicates disregard of the law." "To dismiss the employee * * * requires a written notice with reasons."

Several years ago, in some Regions at least, a Supervisor, to dismiss a probationer was required to show definitely that his work he should show definitely that the man in every way is satisfactory before retention. Positive affirmative proof rather than negative. This condition has been corrected and we are making progress but not near progress enough. This is our real opportunity to choose our men. An examination can not do it. Why not make the greatest possible use of what we have. We are doing better but not well enough. About 98 per cent of the men appointed receive permanent appointment. From my experience at training camps I would say 80 per cent is about right. Just about one out of five do not belong. More than that manage to get by but they help to hold our standards too low.

"The elimination of an employee from the Government service is unavoidable from the standpoint of good organization." Dismissal is a necessary procedure. If probation were properly observed it would be, not less necessary, but less often needed. The legal restrictions on dismissal are not great, but tradition, custom, etc., has made it difficult and disagreeable. It is not much used. One of the arguments for a central personnel agency is the need for "administrative pressure * * * for a more vigorous exercise of the disciplinary power".

3. "Enhancement of the prestige of the public service and enlarging the opportunities of a permanent career."

4. "Improvement of the capacity of Supervisors, through more careful selection of executives and their subsequent training and development."

Supervisor is here used in the industrial sense and not as an

official title.

5. "Provision of educational facilities designed to broaden the horizon and to increase the intelligence and efficiency of Government employees."

6. "Enlistment of the personal interest of employees through various devices such as carefully drawn up suggestion systems, the provisions of well-calculated incentives, the wider practice of forms of recognition and reward, and the use of other methods found successful in modern organizations."

This question of incentive is an unusually important one. We discussed it two years ago but did not near exhaust its possibilities. Industry has been giving it a lot of attention. True, they emphasize the financial incentive, and it is true also that our use of this is limited, yet we should be slow in deciding that we have done all we can. "Unless the Government definitely intends to draw employees possessing little initiative and a mere bread and butter notion of having a job, compensatory incentives must be developed to give the psychic income and a satisfaction which the actual terms of employment do not provide." While low salaries are a "de-centive", high salaries alone are not a dependable incentive. "In spite of the several increases in wages granted by Congress, there seems to be little evidence of universally greater satisfaction among Government employees * * * Indeed, many executives feel that as yet neither the type of worker nor the morale has been bettered, and disappointment is expressed that increases should have brought so little discernible improvement in spirit and efficiency." I think this is true. Looking at it from my own viewpoint I can not see that I work any harder or like my work any better. About the only difference I see is that I don't waste so much energy worrying about how I am going to send the kids to school and things like that. I like my job. You like yours. There is a lot of incentive to each. Yet, we do not want to get too complacent about incentives.

7. "Establishment of physical environment conducive to high output and to personal satisfaction with conditions."

8. "Study hours of work, sick leaves and vacations, not merely to secure reasonable uniformity nationally with regard to these matters but to determine optimum working periods and proper energy cycles."

9. "Maintenance of activities promoting health and safety and reducing the monotony and strains of work."

10. "Study of the conditions of the older workers, with special reference to the reassignments of work, and the revision of some features of the retirement plan regarded as unfair."

11. "Compilation of significant figures for labor turnover and their use in an actual program of reducing the ratio of quits."

That was needed at one time and may be again but right now there are no quits—almost.

12. "Establishment of a procedure for individual grievances affording a free outlet for the expression of complaints and leading to their prompt adjustment."

Industries have found that this question of an outlet for grievances is a very important one. Psychologists tell us that such feelings must have an outlet. The old method of squelching them or denying their existence is like a dam in a stream; it accumulates the water instead of removing it. Various methods are being tried and studied. Employee representation plans and grievance committees have been used. Western Electric is developing a method through interviews. This, judging by the comments of various writers is the most successful for individual complaints and has been a great help in improving administration. The Federal Employees Union acts as a medium for handling group complaints and as such is performing a very useful function. Two or three years ago, one Region held a group ranger meeting for discussing the rangers' "difficulties". There was no superior officer present as an inhibition, so the rangers expressed themselves quite freely. Some executives looked upon this as a dangerous procedure, but in reality it did a lot of good. It was psychologically sound. It removed the "dams" from the streams. It also gave executives reliable information as to how the rangers felt. With the information they were able to improve some things. Without it they could not. We need other experiments and studies.

"Far from being a disadvantage, the expression of a grievance is an aid to the development of sound employment conditions in the Government service." The old idea, now being abandoned in industry but still general in Federal service, is that a complaint should be made direct to the immediate superior. "An instance of such a mistaken notion is the case of an executive who, upon being appointed in charge of a considerable number of employees in the field force of a large city, called them together at a large meeting. Stating that he was anxious to see justice done at all times, he urged the employees, whenever they had any complaints, to tell them to their superiors and justice would be done. He reports that there have never been any serious troubles since, and he seems to feel that this one talk has been an important solution of the problem. What this executive did not recognize is that there are very sound human reasons why most employees do not feel that their interests are taken care of through their immediate supervisors". However, our branch of the service is not so bad.

13. "Provision of machinery for group representation of employees through committees or unions, with the aim of securing constructive cooperation in matters of joint interest."

14. "Establishment of a central leadership in personnel activities, with trained personnel administrators at the head and with subordi-

nate personnel officers of similar training in the various departments, divisions, and bureaus."

15. "Reconsideration of the present separation and duplication of authority with the purpose of unifying the Government personnel organization."

16. "Frequent publication of authoritative reports as to the problems and progress of the Government personnel program."

As said before the report promotes the idea of a central personnel department. "There is no question but that the service as a whole should have a central staff group of modern personnel administrators." This sounds reasonable the way it is put up and if organized in that way it might have a great deal of value. You will notice that the quotation says "staff". The report says also that, "it—personnel management—is a responsibility of the line executives". If this idea were strictly followed, a good trained staff could help a lot, but there is danger that in the organization of such a scheme the new personnel office would be given line authority without line responsibility for economy in turning out the work. The new Personnel Council seems to have only staff functions. If so and if it is given proper support from above and proper cooperation from below, it will be a lot of help to all departments in improving their personnel programs. And whatever it does or does not do we can still continue to improve our own personnel work.

DISCUSSION

Following our discussion methods as in the past, I am going to ask you to discuss this new type of study course as here outlined. How does it appeal to you? How does it compare with the old? Will it get as good results? The whole idea is to furnish you a service that will be a help to you on the job. You have the "Society" and the "Journal" that help you to keep abreast of the times in Forestry. In addition to being a forester you are an executive and must keep up in that line also. Will this help? What are your suggestions?

1. The General idea: Would you prefer the study course as in the past? If you are for the change what is your idea as to how to make it worth most to you? Any features not mentioned above that you would like to see included?

2. What are some of the problems that you would like to discuss or have discussed? Since I will not get your replies in time for our next "lesson", I have chosen "Administrative Studies" for our next discussion. That is a live problem. The discussion was started at the Regional Forester's Meeting in 1930. I am bringing you into it since you are directly concerned. Believe you will find it interesting, and anyhow it is something you are up against so what are you going to do about it? If it is worthwhile we may give it two or three lessons. What do you think of that and what else have you?

3. The details or routines of the plan: How often shall we send out the "lessons" or whatever we call them? 10 days? two weeks? four weeks? No, not once a year for then I would loose my job, and times are hard. There is too much unemployment already. Shall we limit the time when discussions must be in? If we don't will they ever be in? Shall we include lessons and discussions in one publication or separate them as in the past? Should all the discussions of a subject be published together or publish a group of them this time and some more the next? Do you think it best to discuss just one subject at a time or might we at times branch out and take on two or three subjects at one time? Do you think the field will take enough interest to keep me informed as to what are live problems? Possibly the answer to 2 will answer that question also. Without your cooperation this plan cannot go very far. What we are trying to do is to make it yours even to a greater extent than was the old plan.

Another thing, the Forester has approved departure from regular routines to the extent that I may correspond direct with anyone of you concerning articles or questions involved in these studies. So don't be surprised if you get a letter not addressed through the Regional Forester. You may reply direct also if you like.

4. Who shall participate and how? It is my idea that the lessons should go to all Supervisors whether they want them or not and that in addition to this they should go only on request. If you

have a ranger or an assistant whom you think would take an interest and profit from them, they will be sent on your request. If members of the Regional office find them of value they may have them on request. It scarcely seems worth while to publish them for all rangers as some would not read them. Use should be the only criterion. Possibly that should apply to Supervisors also?

Need there be any limitation as to who may take part in the discussions? Anyone who has anything to say should be heard should he not? Anyhow I was just reading that progress in industry is due chiefly to little things contributed here and there by a lot of men rather than to big things from a few big men. What do you think?

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